01/06/98

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THE
Libertarian Ecologist

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GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY ANARCHIST CLUB

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INTERNATIONAL CALL FOR A WORLD CONFERENCE ON THE POLITICS OF SOCIAL ECOLOGY : LIBERTARIAN MUNICIPALISM

An Anarchist Agenda for the 21st Century

During the last few decades the net influence of anarchism as a movement has not grown significantly. Indeed the opportunity and challenge faced by anarchists of today with the demise of the Soviet bloc and the collapse of Marxism-Leninism has not been realised. Neither this opening nor that which the bankruptcy of social democracy has offered has been filled with an anarchist alternative. The traditional work of anarchists has been going on as usual, and valuable as this work is its influence is very small. To be sure there has also been an intellectual flurry around key ideas associated with some prominent anarchists but there has been no socio-political movement with a mass based "politics", in any country or city. There are many small groups of hard-working anarchists making useful contributions in the area of libertarian propaganda, and related educational activities but again the larger influence and movements of the past arising from similar work is not present. Many contemporary anarchists seem to be waiting for something major to break in history. However it is our view that important opportunities seem to occur almost every day. These opportunities if considered seriously can be a future larger movement's building blocks for a significant intervention in changing the course of our times. At this moment in history the politics of every day life do not seem to meld into a larger whole even within a particular geographic region. This situation should be critically examined with a view of preparing a new stage in the development of a neo-anarchist movement, world-wide. It is our view that not withstanding the important work that many anarchists are engaged in throughout the world, there is basically a malaise and stagnation overall. Some observers have noted that there is more confusion than in the past among persons who called themselves anarchists. It is our objective to honestly examine this seeming impasse and determine a course which allows anarchists to move on.

We propose to undertake this discussion about the future of anarchism by organising an international conference on The Politics of Social Ecology: Libertarian Municipalism. While not suggesting that our approach to a contemporary evaluation of anarchism is the only valid approach we do want to make it plain as to why we are taking the perspective we are and at this time. The contemporary anarchist who has not only enriched anarchism as philosophy but whop has also infused it with a much-needed politics is Murray Bookchin. Without a doubt he has produced a corpus of writings dealing with the major concerns of anarchism and anarchists unmatched in terms of quality and quantity since the 1950s.

In 1997 Black Rose Books published an excellent new work, Janet Biehl's The Politics of Social Ecology: Libertarian Municipalism. This book is the most important and useful book on the politics advanced by Bookchin since the publication of his own Urbanisation Without Cities. An international conference dealing with this subject matter therefore is most appropriate.

The timing is also appropriate because Murray Bookchin is 77 years old and still very active, having just completed the second volume of his Third Revolution and now working on the third and final volume. We wish him well and we would like to take the opportunity to learn from him now and draw out from him, the most important and original of our contemporary anarchist thinkers, the parameters of an anarchist agenda for the 21st century.

Our contribution to the challenge of the future of anarchism is to organise the first international conference on the politics of social ecology. This international conference on the theory and practice of social ecology as experienced in a number of cities and towns may lead to a global communication network of individuals and groups. The international conference will have two parts: one part to be held in Lisbon, and the second part in Vermont.

Why Lisbon? The libertarian municipalist dimension of contemporary anarchism and the social ecology of Murray Bookchin have been extensively propagated in Lisbon among the Portuguese comrades. Given the heritage of the libertarian and communal aspects of the Portuguese revolution of 1974, and the fact that among the European anarchists the Portuguese have shown themselves consistently interested in the renewal of anarchism, Lisbon would be an appropriate location for the largest number of interested persons to gather on that side of the Atlantic Ocean. As part of an international consultative group, a local organising committee has been formed in Lisbon which has the mandate to deal with the logistics of the first part of the conference. This city is the ideal location in Europe. The date for the Lisbon conference is August 26-28, 1998.

As a follow-up to the Lisbon conference, and to give the maximum opportunity for those interested from North, Central and South America to participate, it is proposed to have a second conference on the same subject in Plainfield, Vermont, on the new campus of the Institute for Social Ecology, in September 1999.

The conference/s will be guided by an international advisory committee (iac) that will advise the international organising committee (ioc) about who to contact in various cities and towns that might want to register. The working language is English. Written texts to the conference/s can be submitted in English and French.

The conference/s is open to persons inter-

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EDITORIAL
Rationale for this Bulletin

The Institute for Social Ecology in Brisbane is supporting the International Conference on the "Politics of Social Ecology: Libertarian Municipalism" which will be held in September 1998 in Lisbon and during Summer 1999 in Vermont.

We joined the International Advisory Committee and are currently establishing a network of groups and individuals in Australia who would be interested in participating in the Conference. We see the organisation as a confederal structure of groups and interested individuals that write contributions, arrange publicity for the events, organise local meetings and conferences and raise money for delegates to attend.

The Libertarian Ecologist is designed to be an Australian mouthpiece and debating forum for all activists who may be interested in the pros or cons of the Libertarian Municipalist strategy. We intend to publish editions approximately quarterly until the two-year conference process is complete.

The Brisbane Institute for Social Ecology has compiled this initial four-page edition with a view to introduce the conference and the idea of Libertarian Municipalism to as wide an audience of potentially interested people as possible. 1000 have been printed and distributed. We intend for the second and further editions to be at least eight pages and invite written and financial contributions from anyone interested in the debate. Organisations who wish to make a contribution of $50.00 or more are invited to advertise their organisation in the bulletin.

We have also negotiated an extremely good return fare to Lisbon with Atlas Travel Brisbane. Including insurance and taxes along the way it comes to just under $2,000. If you wish to be part of this deal, call Brian on (07) 3844 4973 or mention us or the conference to Atlas Travel direct on (07) 3844 1303 (ask for Aphrodite).

...FROM PAGE 1

ested to discuss and advance the politics of social ecology: libertarian municipalism. To this end, the conference/s is open to theorists and militants in the areas of urban and community planning and organisation, architects, urban ecologists, left-wing municipal greens and libertarian socialist municipally elected persons, as well as anarchists interested in transforming neighbourhoods, cities and towns.

The format of the conference/s will include lectures, roundtables, workshops based on certain cities' experiences, and workshops based on themes.

The ioc is based in Lisbon and Montreal/Burlington. Both parts of the ioc have met several times and the conference is being sponsored by SOCIOS, at the Instituto Superior de Economica e Gestao (ISEG) and the department of sociology of the Instituto Superior de Ciencias do Trabah Lho e da Empresa (ISCTE), both in Lisbon; Black Rose Books (Montreal), The Urban Ecology Center, or SODECM (Montreal), Institut pour une Ecosociete (Quebec), Institute for Social Ecology (Plainfield, Vermont), Fundacion des Estudios Libertarios "Salvador Segui" (Madrid) and Institute for Social Ecology (Brisbane Australia). Other institutional sponsors are being solicited. ■

WHAT IS LIBERTARIAN MUNICIPALISM?

Libertarian Municipalism is a political program in the tradition of anarchist-communism developed by Murray Bookchin in the course of a long life as a left-wing revolutionary. Bookchin argues for a radical direct participatory democracy at the level at which it can work—the community level.

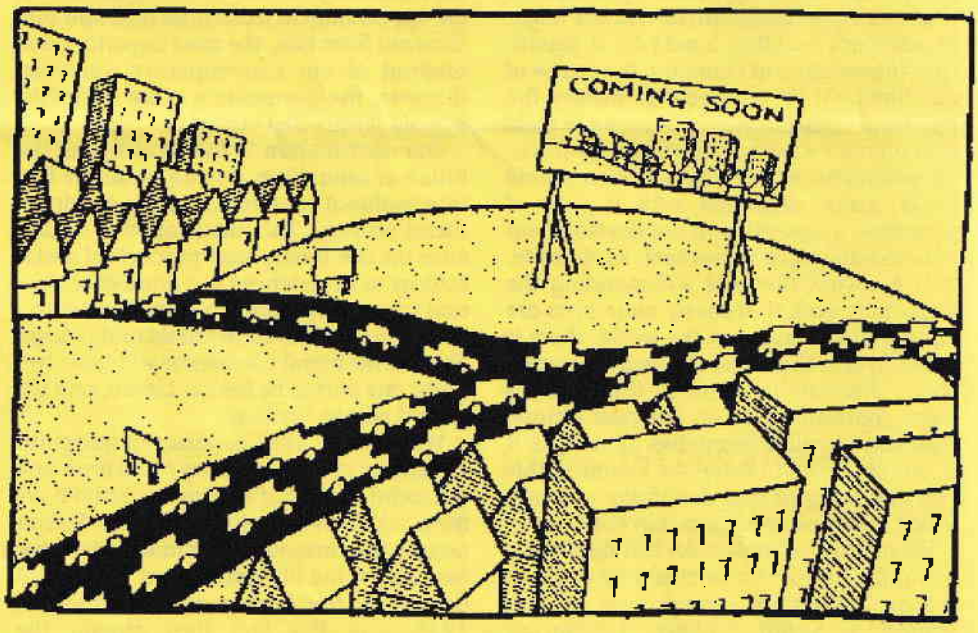
A given "municipality" is defined not by structural or size criteria, but by its comprehensibility and manageability by the citizens who live there. In rural Australia many towns would be municipalities in themselves, whilst most urban areas would have to literally decentralise politically into perhaps hundreds of self-manageable communities. This process of redefinition has been noted with increasing frequency by a variety of social commentators, and social ecologists feel that they are going with the grain of social evolution in this strategy, despite enormous hierarchical resistance to it.

In the tradition of anarchist-communism, Libertarian Municipalism does not recognise state borders but considers itself in internationalist terms (someone recently coined the term "interpolis", which is in fact more accurate). It envisions confederations of communities according to bioregions and socioregions, with power by mandated delegation continuing to travel upwards to continental and global confederations, according to the regional and global administrative needs of humanity.

All delegates to confederal bodies (as well as local administrative bodies) are to be elected by their full body of constituents, according to one-person/one-vote. They are mandated as to their responsibilities and their institutional "opinions" and finally checked by the ever-present capacity for their supporters to recall them. The base of society is to be the highest authority and the pinnacle is the most subordinated.

As a program in practice, Libertarian Municipalism can mean running for local elections with an explicit view to radically alter the town-charter and institutionalise empowered citizen bodies, which can then counterpose themselves by confederation to state power. Depending on our situation, and the nature of our City Councils, Libertarian Municipalism can also mean developing extra-legal assemblies around local issues, institutionalising them as democratic forums and developing their moral power, again with a view to confederating them in opposition to the legitimacy of the state. The Brisbane ISE would suggest that this may be more appropriate for the Australian institutional situation. It is a matter for continued debate and it is clear that many of our comrades around the world feel that the vestiges of local institutions from the past offer them unique opportunities to further the Libertarian Municipalist program very quickly and uncontainably. Therefore they will contest local elections directly under a radical anarchist platform.

The insight here is that anarchists have never been against voting and elections as such. Democratising all sorts of community based organisations from workplaces to P&Cs and sports clubs has always been standard anarchist-communist practice. Libertarian Municipalism takes the controversial step of suggesting that we must extend these attempts to democratise undemocratic institutions to the City Council level of politics. Considering the profound impasse that anarchist-communism has encountered in the face of the apparently extraordinary historic opportunities available, we ask anarchists to examine and consider this strategy very carefully before discounting it as compromise. ■



BOOK REVIEW

Janet Beihl
The Politics of Social Ecology: Libertarian Municipalism

Black Rose Books, Montreal, 1997

JANET BEIHL's new book is nothing short of a manifesto. In one broad sweep she outlines the historical and theoretical underpinnings of Social Ecology along with a clearly articulated strategy for bringing its revolutionary promise into effect. All of the book's themes have been covered in much greater detail by Murray Bookchin, particularly in From Urbanisation to Cities, but Beihl has done what many of us have dreamed about, and put it in a nutshell, in a clear, accessible programatic form. For those who love to bathe in the richness of our language; for those who require a thoroughness of critique of the different answers being proposed for the compelling questions of our time; for those who prefer a solid base of ideas in which to contemplate and finish questions alone rather than a crisp package of conclusions, read Bookchin. Grasping the guts of revolutionary Social Ecology will take longer reading Bookchin, and will be far more challenging, but it will be a much fuller, deeper understanding. Beihl's book is for those who wish to confront the full body of social ecology's conclusions quickly, without a whole lot of critical digression.

Libertarian Municipalism is rightly placed in the anarchist-communist tradition of political thought, even whilst it takes a rigorous critical stance towards all of the popular movements of the past, including anarchist-communism. Its political goal is to cultivate popular assemblies of citizens which manage their communities in a directly participatory way. In its own terms, libertarian municipalism seeks to cultivate a political realm which simply does not exist today—a realm where ordinary people come together to discuss, debate and deliberate the issues of the moment and directly formulate and implement community policy.

In terms of changing the world, Libertarian Municipalism is to the nation-state what Permaculture is to agribusiness and cooporatives are to supermarket chains. Its revolutionary imperative stems from the insight that such noble, moral strategies as Permaculture, food-coops, LETS systems, alternative technology and the like, all of which operate with a rationale of developing a dual economic power to capitalism, are vain unless we develop a dual political power to the nation-state. We must place the apparently impossible nature of this task in the context of the grindingly inevitable death of all life under the present social order. Our age demands universal heroism on this count. If we are not committed to humanity and all life more than we are committed to ourselves, then a few of us will be superficially happy for a while longer, before we all die. The insight of our age is that neither God, destiny, dialectical materialism or the invisible hand is going to deliver New Jerusalem. We're going to have to imagine it and build it ourselves, with the bodies and the consciousnesses that biological evolution has delivered, or a perfectly naturalistic judgement, probably with perfectly secular hellfire, will befall us all.

Hamish Alcorn
Brisbane ISE

TERRY FISHER

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Murray Bookchin Comments on Chomsky's "Goals and Visions" address to Australian Anarchist Conference January 1996

"A libertarian municipalist movement would, of course, fight for the redress of specific injustices, and these should be in its program, even as it fights for the broader goals of freedom and direct democracy. But fighting against injustices alone, without offering an ideal of freedom, will not get to the root of the injustices that we want to correct. One Anarchist I know has recently said that he has a "vision" of an anarchist society, but that it's somewhere off in the distance. At present he works to fulfil his more short-term "goals", goals that involve correcting injustices—including the strengthening of the State, no less!

But the struggle against injustices can't be separated from the struggle for freedom. If it is, we'll still be burdened by the same social order, slightly or perhaps significantly more just, but still one that inevitably must inflict increasing damage on society and the natural world. A living connection must exist between our vision and our goals, such that our visions feed into our goals and give them immediacy. Otherwise, if goals and visions are bifurcated, we are functioning more as caretakers of capitalism, who are giving it a human face, rather than as revolutionaries trying to overthrow the root causes of all these injustices, as well as restrictions on the freedom and self-realization of all human beings."

The Politics of Social Ecology: Libertarian Municipalism
by Janet Beihl, p.167

SOCIAL ECOLOGY CONFERENCE—LISBON
26th–28th August 1998

Anarchists have always been internationalists. Committed to the unfolding of human needs in egalitarian social, economic and cultural communities they have opposed all nation-states constructed by ideologies such as fascism, marxism/Leninism and liberal democracy.

In past libertarian revolutions such as the Paris commune, the Mexican Revolution 1911-1919, the Spanish Revolution 1936-1939, and libertarian influenced uprisings such as Hungary 1956, France 1968, Czechoslovakia 1968, anarchist individuals and organisations have participated or taken part in support activity. In 1998 anarchists from around the world are active in self-determination struggles in metropolitan areas and in countries whose resources have been threatened by transnational capitalism. Libertarian socialists have especially directed their aid to the non-authoritarian forces of the Mexican Revolution in Chiapas.

The global capitalists are destroying the nation-states and economies of most countries today. This is largely with the acquiesence of the elite groups who show little solidarity with the needs of their own people. Although their economic theory calls for the minimum role of the state compared to the maximum role of the market, the G-8, the most powerful capitalist regimes, are maintaining massive state apparatus such as armies, and police to enforce their imperial domination.

As they rush to break down all social resistance to frenzied growth which will threaten the very biological basis of existence anarchists will need to play their part in supporting urban, rural and wilderness struggles which oppose these destructive forces.

And more, anarchists will need to proactively envision the conditions for human freedom and the continuation of life on Earth. To clarify the moral principles required to build a human and species loving community.

And still more, anarchists will need to build those societies, economies, cultures and diverse environments.

The Social Ecology conference in Lisbon 26th-28th August 1998 is dedicated to these tasks. It acknowledges the existence of resilient and courageous anarchist groups in many parts of the world but faces the obvious problem that their existing ideas and capabilities for winning mass democratic influence seem fragile to put it mildly.

This conference is based specifically on the tenants of Social Ecology which draws largely from the Anarchist/Communist tradition and emphasises the struggle against hierarchy in all its forms but includes the insights and experience of other socialist traditions which have emphasised class socialisation as the major factor in oppressing people.

We are interested in discussing with all socialists and communists who are opposed to any form of domination and exploitation the project of universal liberation.

We are not interested in debating with authoritarian socialists or communists who believe in the maintenance of hierarchical societies, economies and states.

As well we call upon those people who call themselves anarchists because they are against all social institutions, including egalitarian ones, to explain to us how a society, economy and ecological system will work based only on individualism. While social ecology anarchists support the maximum extension of personal liberty in all areas of life we accept that egalitarian collective agreement is the mesh of all societies and economies. Indeed even in oppressive ones based on capitalism it is this mesh which provides the basis of any possibility of resistance.

We are printing the ***Libertarian Ecologist*** as an occasional newsletter to promote debate, discussion and circulate papers being prepared for the conference in Lisbon. Please feel free to take part in this endeavour. If you wish to become an active supporter of the project and help build a continental committee to facilitate the event and its follow up conference in Vermont 1999 please contact us in any of the following ways:

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Brian Laver
International Organising Committee

P.S. **If you can help fund this newsletter we would like to get 20 people in Australia who will give $50.00 each time it comes out (approx every three months from now till the end of 1999). Any contribution is welcome.**

Conference Organisers

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